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Empathy, Through the Mud: The Traditions of Aby Warburg and Edgar Wind in Australia

Giles Fielke

Abstract

In 2023 a film written and directed by the acclaimed Kaytetye filmmaker Warwick Thornton premiered at the 76th Cannes Film Festival. *The New Boy* stars Aswan Reid and Cate Blanchett, who also co-produced the film, and draws on Thornton's experiences as a boarding student at a Benedictine college in New Norcia, near Australia's west coast. This mid-nineteenth century settlement by Benedictine missionaries is notable in Australian art history for its direct connection between the European colonisation of the continent's west and the collection of Renaissance-era works of art that – upon first glance – seem to be so remote from their commissioning and histories related to, for example, the workshops of Raphael, Giulio Romano, and Giovanni Francesco Penni. This essay reflects on the theoretical connection between contemporary works on film and the study of art and its histories in Australia, by looking specifically at the influence of *Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaft* from Aby Warburg and Edgar Wind, and into Australian university departments of art history. In particular I focus on the seminars on method given by Professor Jaynie Anderson in collaboration with Professor Richard Woodfield at the University of Melbourne in 2010, and speculate on the lasting effects of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA) congress chaired by Professor Anderson in Melbourne in 2008 and titled 'Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence'. I argue that the 'myth of isolation' identified by Bernard Smith in his 1961 lectures at the University of Queensland still have some bearing on the development of art history in Australia, and that the conflation of images by First Peoples with Christian iconography remains contested in public debates on Australian national symbols such as the Southern Cross, and in our histories more broadly, by introducing the astronomy of First Peoples for the constellations of the southern hemisphere.

Keywords

Art historiography, Australia, Jaynie Anderson, New Norcia, Warwick Thornton

What appears at first sight to be isolation often turns out, it seems to me, to be a process of selection and rejection.

—Bernard Smith¹

In recent years it has been helpful to remember that there is no art history, only art historians. To paraphrase Sir Ernst Gombrich in this way might propose an ironic path, at odds and yet completely in sympathy with Edgar Wind's approach to the discipline. In a new book on Wind's work, *Edgar Wind: Art and Embodiment*, Professor Anderson reminds us how Wind understood this problem intuitively: as the first professor of art history at Oxford, the German expatriate would need to transcend the discipline and take people 'beyond routine scholarship, to the excitement of theory'.² The stakes of the discipline have, of course, always been fiercely contested. In 2008 the 32nd congress of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA) in Melbourne cogently made the case for a global art history, as against the apparently ignorant figure of the 'Australian bushman', who appears in the famous introduction to Erwin Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology*, first published in 1939, and who is counterposed to an 'ancient Greek'.³ Yet, if Australia figured at all in the minds of Wind and his model detective, Aby Warburg, it was as the antipodean outpost for a set of cultural lineages that continue to swirl around us today as antiquities in the present; the 'old world' is a European vision, and so is its attendant cosmology. It is a further irony that Warburg's self-embodiment as a 'seismograph of the soul' resonates – however awkwardly – with the dissemination of the term 'empath' in recent years, which has seemingly entered the vernacular of our present generation not via art history but from the popular psychology of Hollywood, promoting intuitive psychiatry for the treatment of modern symptoms arising from a great complex of inheritances. (The emergence of memes as a popular form has also obscured Warburg's image-theory of empathic engrams.) In Australia today the discipline of art history is generally prefaced with a form of apologia, yet it is only into the outspread arms of such a disciplinary community that we find the solace required to carry on these debates. This brings us, of course, to our immediate concern: the transmission of a methodological approach that is contested, challenged, and very nearly extinguished today in preference for something like arts

¹ Bernard Smith, 'The Myth of Isolation' (1961), in Rex Butler and Sheridan Palmer (eds), *Antipodean Perspective: Selected Writings of Bernard Smith* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2018), p. 119.

² Jaynie Anderson, 'Understanding Excessive Brevity: The Critical Reception of Edgar Wind's *Art and Anarchy*', in *Edgar Wind: Art and Embodiment*, ed. by Jaynie Anderson, Bernardino Branca, and Fabio Tononi (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2024), p. 354.

³ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (1939) (Oxford: Icon Editions, 1972), p. 4. The CIHA congress, titled 'Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence' was held on 13–18 January 2008. Significantly, the Biennale Arte, the 60th International Art Exhibition at Venice, themed *Foreigners Everywhere* by the Brazilian curator Adriano Pedrosa, comes quite close to reasserting Professor Anderson's theme as CIHA chair in 2008, when she stated that 'we are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants, even Indigenous peoples'. In 2024, the Golden Lion for Best National Participation was awarded for the first time to Australia, represented by Kamilaroi/Bigambul artist Archie Moore at its national pavilion in the Giardini. His work, *kith and kin*, is on display at the time of writing.

management. Usually, these questions are focused upon an image, or images. In honour of Professor Anderson, who set me on this path more than a decade ago now, what follows outlines a recent constellation I've found.

New Norcia is a historic town a two-hour drive north of Perth on National Highway 95, around the country's west coast. The small community there is built around a Benedictine monastery founded by Spanish missionaries in 1847, a full decade before the City of Perth was officially declared. Named for the Umbrian birthplace of the order's patron, Saint Benedict, the New Norcia farmlands remained in the possession of the order for nearly two centuries, until late 2021, when 8,000 hectares were sold to the private investment company of the Forrest family, Tattarang. Salient features of the town – which grew from a mission to the Yued people of the Noongar cultural bloc and eventually became the site of several Catholic colleges – are its remaining mission architecture and its collections, now maintained by the New Norcia Museum and Art Gallery. Today the site appears transformed as a living monument to the colonisation of Australia, and – as I'll discuss further below – it also survives on our screens.

One of the works in the collection at New Norcia is a sixteenth-century cartoon in tempera on paper, depicting the head of an apostle from a larger design for the Pentecost image of the descent of the Holy Spirit from the *Life of Christ (Scuola Nuova)* series of tapestries most likely commissioned by Pope Leo X and continued by Pope Clement VII after 1520. Today eleven of the twelve works in the cycle survive in the collections of the Vatican, with the *Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost* installed in the Pope's private chapel, Cappella Paolina. Like the frescos in the Hall of Constantine, the designs are understood to be from the workshop of Raphael, under the direction of Giulio Romano and Giovanni Francesco Penni following the death of the master.⁴ This means that the work is contemporary with the moment Warburg identifies as 'reshaping living movement in terms of the elevated style of the great art of the pagan ancestors'.⁵ The image of the apostle, possibly painted by Tomasso Vincidor, can be compared with nineteenth-century reproductions in the United Kingdom's Royal Collection Trust – in its Raphael collection – but the New Norcia image of the youngest apostle is retrograde: instead of facing right as he does in the reproduction, the apostle (previously identified as John) appears in the cartoon facing left, because tapestries are worked from the back (Figures 1 and 2).

⁴ See Thomas P. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), pp. 237–41. The 'Pentecost' *Scuola Nuova* tapestry, woven 1524–31 in Brussels and now hanging in the Cappella Paolina, Vatican, measures 538 × 669 cm. The cartoon head was acquired for the New Norcia collection by Abbot Catalan in 1941, when it was deaccessioned by the National Gallery of Victoria. The work, restored by Sir Joshua Reynolds in the eighteenth century, has been in Australia since the mid-nineteenth century.

⁵ Aby Warburg, 'The Entry of the Idealising Classical Style in the Painting of the Early Renaissance' (1914), reprinted in *Art History as Cultural History*, ed. by Richard Woodfield (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), pp. 25–26.



Figure 1. Workshop of Raphael (possibly Tommaso Vincidor), *Head of an Apostle*, c. 1520–31, tempera on paper, 75 × 75 cm (approx.), New Norcia: New Norcia Art Gallery.



Figure 2. Tullio Marcucci (active nineteenth century), *The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the Virgin Mary (The Pentecost)*, c. 1850–1900, engraving, 47.5 × 49.7 cm (plate mark), London: Royal Collections Trust, RCIN 853306.

I can think of no better symbol than this of the remoteness, the distances, that exist between the Australian landscape and Renaissance Europe. This small work from the Italian Renaissance, and others like it in the collection at New Norcia, are publicly accessible in the monastery's visitor centre, more than 100 kilometres north of Perth, which itself is often referred to as the 'most isolated city in the world'. It is images such as these, and the iconography of the Cross dating back to its adoption by the fourth-century Emperor Constantine, which many First Peoples from the region have encountered as the iconography of the religious institution brought by the colonial settlers.

In the fourth issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography*, guest-edited by Anderson and published in 2011, among the selection of documents on Australian art historiography is a chapter from the PhD dissertation by art historian and former head of Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia, Mary Eagle. In part, the chapter focuses on the figure of Yued/Giragiok artist William Monop and his interview with the untrained anthropologist Daisy Bates in Perth around the year 1906, following his time at New Norcia (from 1864 into the 1880s). In this chapter, Eagle makes the case for the significance and influence of Monop in the development of Australian modernism, particularly in contrast to the work of the celebrated non-Indigenous painter and printmaker Margaret Preston, who worked mainly in Sydney. The question of influence understood by Eagle here focuses her analysis on the cultural significance of the works, and she even refers to the formalist method of Alois Riegl to distinguish between the respective approaches of Monop and Preston to the representation of native Australian plants. Yet their connection remains explicit in Eagle's account. This reveals something of the approach to art undertaken by Eagle, one that has understood and engaged the dazzling iconological theory developed by Warburg and applied it here to the history of art in Australia. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the strength of Australian art history's connection to the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes and to the Vienna school of art history, through figures such as Ursula Hoff and Franz Philipp, who taught Jaynie Anderson in Melbourne, as well as historians of art and culture such as Charles Mitchell, Bernard Smith, Robert Gaston, and of course Wind – all with significant connections to the development of art history in Australia following the relocation of the Warburg Institute to London in 1933. (The Italian engagement with Warburg has also been felt through the reception of Giorgio Agamben in literary theory and philosophy in Melbourne in particular.)

This past year has seen the release of *The New Boy*, a film by the Kaytetye filmmaker and artist Warwick Thornton. In the 1970s, Thornton – then a young and wayward child from Mparntwe Alice Springs – was sent to New Norcia, almost 2,500 kilometres away. Premiering at the 76th Cannes Film Festival in 2023, Thornton's film – produced by and starring Australian actor Cate Blanchett – conflates the biographies of earlier figures like Monop with the filmmaker's own. Thornton remembers his time at the Salvado College largely with fondness: the pleasures of olive oil and siestas contrast with Thornton's initial horror as an eleven-year-old boy upon encountering the image of Christ on the Cross, and it is in this way that he recounts his memory of New Norcia during an interview recorded

for *The Screen Show* on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National,⁶ following the film's representation of a similar image. Although Thornton does not explicitly mention Monop's biography in his telling of the story of a young Indigenous boy at a Catholic orphanage during the 1940s, Eagle has already made the case for the art-historical significance of Monop as a spiritual leader who, according to Bates' record of his life, 'possessed magical *boyhya* powers'.⁷ This characteristic – magic – is an important theme for Thornton's protagonist in *The New Boy*, who at one point in the film appears to heal a child bitten by a snake.

Even Blanchett, who is from Melbourne, can be figured otherwise. Today she appears in the image of Simonetta Vespucci, that is, in the stereotypical ideal of Western beauty and its theatrical embodiment by a living person. In Thornton's film, Blanchett's role as the nun in charge of the monastery following the death of the abbot functions in a way to mediate the distinctions between Hollywood-style cinematic conventions and the Australian film production, as well as between the non-Indigenous settler presence on the country of a people whose encounter with missionary projects like New Norcia was a direct result of the colonisation of Australia by European settlers after 1788.



Figure 3. Cate Blanchett and Aswan Reid in *The New Boy* (2023), written and directed by Warwick Thornton.

⁶ Jason di Rosso, 'Warwick Thornton on *The New Boy* and Christopher McQuarrie and Cast from *Mission Impossible – Dead Reckoning*', on *The Screen Show* (Sydney: ABC Radio National, 6 July 2023), <<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/the-screen-show/warwick-thornton-the-new-boy-mission-impossible/102499838>>.

⁷ Mary Eagle, 'Multiple Contexts in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century', *Australian Art Historiography*, special issue of *Journal of Art Historiography*, 4.1 (June 2011), guest-edited by Jaynie Anderson, p. 8.

The point I am making is that it is only by emphasising the polysemantic meaning of the term ‘distance’ in *Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften* that global art history becomes possible. In the idea of Renaissance historical distinction from the medieval, and furthermore for Warburg’s concept of psychic distance between irrationality and reason, the notion of geographical distance still marks our initial sense of the periphery and the antipodes. These ideas about distance also inform the concept of provincialism, a lingering and still relevant idea about the production of art in Australia. But as Anderson cites Terry Smith in her introduction to the edited collection on Australian art historiography, ‘being provincial is a matter of choice not geography’.⁸ So too is isolation. In Thornton’s film it is the new boy (remaining nameless until he is eventually christened Francis toward the end of the film) who questions and challenges the presence of Christian iconography and its institutional embeddedness on his Country.⁹ Arguably, following Anderson’s proposition about provincialism, we must still hear the words of Bernard Smith as a perpetual influence on these concepts. To be clear: conceptually the peripheral and the provincial are not the same. Nevertheless, there is a clear correspondence in the centrality of the idea of physical distance that echoes a central tenet of history, that is, our present distance from the past. Distance in time is also relevant, and in the Warburgian parlance this becomes a question of survivals. It is our relative isolation that mediates this distance.

In 1961 Bernard Smith, the preeminent historian of Australian art history, gave the annual lectures in memory of the politician John Murtagh Macrossan at the University of Queensland. Under the title ‘Australian Painting Today’, the first lecture focused on what Smith called ‘the myth of isolation’. It explicitly broached the presence of the Renaissance as a symbol of distance, of the international migration of images, to Australia via colonisation. Of course, as Smith had just published *European Vision and the South Pacific* – the celebrated book that appeared a decade after his initial paper on the topic was first published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* – the question of its continuing relevance remained at the forefront of his mind. Here Smith was in fierce agreement with Franz Philipp, that artists in Australia were deeply concerned with appropriating the style of figuration from the art of the past.¹⁰ Yet the conscious selection or rejection of style gave rise to the question of provincialism, which in the context of the Whitechapel exhibition of Australian painting in 1961 allowed Smith to make a point about the function of ‘primitivism’ as a discourse for artistic modernism in the twentieth century.¹¹ Whereas Philipp saw Arthur Boyd as an Australian artist indebted to the mannerism of the sixteenth century, today we might make similar claims for artists based in Melbourne and exhibiting

⁸ Jaynie Anderson, ‘Art Historiography in Australia and New Zealand’, introductory essay in *Australian Art Historiography*, special issue of *Journal of Art Historiography*, 4.1 (June 2011), guest-edited by Jaynie Anderson, p. 1.

⁹ *The New Boy*, 1:45.30.

¹⁰ See Sheridan Palmer, *Centre of the Periphery: Three European Art Historians in Melbourne* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008), p. 9.

¹¹ Bernard Smith, ‘The Myth of Isolation’ (1961), in *Antipodean Perspective: Selected Writings of Bernard Smith*, ed. by Rex Butler and Sheridan Palmer (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2018), pp. 77–87.

internationally, for example, in the work of contemporary painters such as Travis MacDonald or Tim Bučković. Smith's point, however, as I understand it, was here focused more on the question of history as inheritance.

There remains a clear sense, despite the over-reliance on Greenbergian formalism in the way art-historical discourse on the twentieth century in Australia is commonly taught, that the presence of the 'idealising classical style' and its development in and on this country has persisted now for centuries. Smith, who was notably an Australian-born art historian, wrote about the influence of the Renaissance on Australian art precisely to refute those who would rather see the emergence of a latent national style in reaction to it, who at the time included Kenneth Clark and Robert Hughes. To return briefly to empathy, we might see in Smith's insistence on continuity rather than a break, the emergence of a suturing – however difficult – of the splitting between empathy as aesthetic experience and empathy as interpersonal experience in contemporary theory. By giving agency to isolation, there is also the possibility of identifying the local stylistic developments best represented for Smith in the ambiguous and perhaps collective figure of the Port Jackson Painter from the beginning of the colonisation of Australia.

This year the Kate Challis RAKA Award, set up by Smith, will be awarded to the best script for film or television screened in the past five years. Each year of the five-year cycle awards a different area of the arts: creative prose, drama, the visual arts, script-writing (screenplay or for theatre), and poetry. This thoroughly Warburgian concatenation of theatre and fine art demonstrates the ways in which works for the screen have become a significant location for the migration of images, and for stylistic figuration in contemporary art. (The script writers of Warwick Thornton's *Sweet Country*, Steven McGregor and David Tranter, won the RAKA Award for their screenplay for the 2017 film.) Professor Anderson was the first academic I met at the University of Melbourne who would encourage me to pursue art history, and it was in her methods seminar in 2010, co-taught with visiting professorial fellow Richard Woodfield in the year I took it, that I was introduced to Warburg's theories. In particular I remember reading the book *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* by Philippe-Alain Michaud, because it interrogated the obvious link between Warburg's theorisation of movement and the moving image in media studies.¹² This led me to write an honours thesis that attempted a Warburgian analysis of a recent experimental work of cinema by Ben Russell, titled *Let Each One Go Where He May* (2009).¹³ Although Anderson was sympathetic to my initial project, I distinctly recall her wondering out loud, after grading it, whether the filmmaker Russell would be remembered at all in the future. This year Russell and his collaborator Guillaume Cailleau were awarded the Berlinale prize for best film in the Encounters section, and the Grand Prix at the Cinéma du réel

¹² Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. by Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

¹³ See Giles Simon Fielke, 'The Image out of History: Ben Russell's *Let Each One Go Where He May* and Cultural Memory', *International Journal of the Image*, 4.4 (2014), pp. 93–102, doi:10.18848/2154-8560/CGP/v04i04/44153.

International Documentary Festival for their film *Direct Action* (2024), so of course I now feel cautiously vindicated. Meeting Woodfield in Anderson's seminar, and my sense that a direction following the question of a Warburgian 'method' could productively be taken towards the cinema, was the beginning of my work in art history, which continues today. Warburg, suddenly, became the most significant intellectual figure I had ever encountered.

There are questions that remain, however. Warburg's understanding of the Renaissance as the 'mystical' name for the age of 'international migration of images' belies the complexities and contestation of his deployment of *Nachleben* as a concept.¹⁴ It was not quite a neologism; rather, Warburg developed the idea from an essay first published in 1862 by the Czech-German art historian Anton Springer, titled 'Nachleben der Antike'.¹⁵ The cluster of interrelated terms variously translated in the anglophone literature as 'afterlife', 'survival', and 'renewal' (the German *Erneuerung* became *rinascita* in the 1966 translation of Warburg's work into Italian) means that Warburg's work often remains enigmatic today. Georges Didi-Huberman would describe it with the following strained terms (originally in the French):

Nachleben refers to the survival (the continuity or afterlife and metamorphosis) of images and motifs – as opposed to their renaissance after extinction or, conversely, their replacement by innovations in image and motif.¹⁶

Yet in the context of Australian history, the word 'survival' takes on a particularly post-colonial resonance. The violent legacy of the dispossession of most of the country from its First Peoples means that, in a way that comes closest to Warburg's memory of his trip to New Mexico in 1895, the present conditions for an iconological understanding of Australian art demand that Australian national symbols be recognised as installed upon, and perhaps even fabricated from, the ground such as it is charged with non-Western kinship systems and institutional structures. This is despite the apparent modernity of these symbols. For example, the ubiquitous constellation known as the Crux, or Southern Cross to Western astronomers, is also called Bunya (possum) by the Boorong people of Victoria, and the shared image of the giant emu figure (whom the Boorong called Tchingal), which includes the stars Alpha and Beta Centauri – the Pointer constellation –

¹⁴ Warburg, cited in Richard Woodfield, 'Warburg's "method"', in *Art History as Cultural History*, ed. by Richard Woodfield (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), pp. 280–01.

¹⁵ See Han Lamers, *Afterlife of Antiquity: Anton Springer (1825–1891) on the Classical Tradition* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2019). Warburg's development of *Nachleben* as a technical term in his vocabulary can be situated between the etymologies of *Leben nach dem Tod* (afterlife) and *Überleben* (survival). In Italian in 1966 Warburg's term appeared as *rinascita* (Renaissance) when *Nachleben* is developed from Anton Springer's *Das Nachleben der Antike im Mittelalter* (1862).

¹⁶ Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time', trans. by Vivian Rehberg and Boris Belay, *Common Knowledge*, 9.2 (2003), p. 273.

leads to a direct confrontation between the Southern Cross and Aboriginal astronomy.¹⁷ The image of a cross in the sky is conflated, then, with other astronomical stories. These images have then been syncretised as the direct result of colonisation. The clearest illustration of this question of survival can be found in another film, *Two Laws* (1981), a collaboration between Alessandro Cavadini, Carolyn Strachan, the Borroloola community, and the Yanyuwa people.¹⁸ Here the collision of different systems, and the survival of the laws of First Peoples, are laid bare. In this way *Nachleben* becomes closest to ‘memory’ in the expanded sense of a cultural transmission. Of course, the figure of Mnemosyne remains today a thoroughly Warburgian image, however contemporary theorists of memory and antiquity, like the late Jan Assmann, have developed the concept from its basis in Warburg’s *Kunstwissenschaft* to theorise beyond the discipline of art history.¹⁹ Today it is also present in part of a general philosophical program critically engaged by the phenomenology of the late Bernard Stiegler, in what he eloquently termed the organisation of the inorganic as the material memory of cultures.²⁰

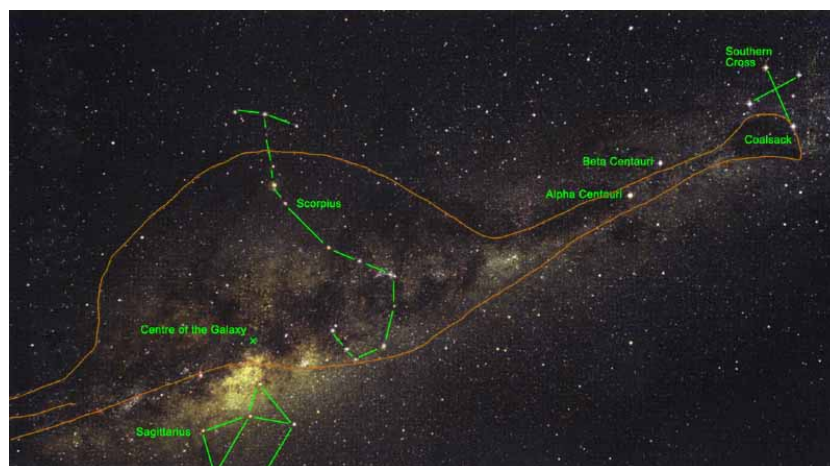


Figure 4. Emu nebulae and constellations. Image: Museums Victoria, Scienceworks.

¹⁷ John Morieson, ‘Bunya’, and ‘Tchingal’, in John Morieson, *Stars over Tyrrell: The Night Sky Legacy of the Boorong* (Sea Lake, Victoria: Sea Lake Historical Society, 2002), n.p. See also John Morieson, ‘The Night Sky of the Boorong: Partial Reconstruction of a Disappeared Culture in North-West Victoria’ (MA thesis, Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, 1996), <http://www.aboriginalastronomy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Morieson_Thesis.pdf>; Ragbir Bhathal, *Aboriginal Astronomy* (Sydney: ARI, 2010). Thornton has also investigated the significance of the Crux and Southern Cross iconography in a documentary titled *We Don’t Need a Map* (Sydney: Barefoot Communications, NITV, Cutting Edge, Brendan Fletcher, 2017).

¹⁸ See Alessandro Cavadini and Carolyn Strachan, ‘*Two Laws*: A Filmmaking Journey’, *Screening the Past*, 31 (August 2011): Cinema Between Media, <<http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-31-dossier-u-matic-to-youtube/two-laws-a-filmmaking-journey/>>.

¹⁹ Jan Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, trans. by John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), pp. 125–33, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>>.

²⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 17.

This leads, finally, to the most significant encounter I had while a student of Professor Anderson's, when I discovered her name in the letters of the *London Review of Books*. Replying in 1984 to Charles Hope's review of her edited collection of Edgar Wind's writing *The Eloquence of the Symbols*, Anderson demonstrated something that was both revelatory and edifying to my mind.²¹ The dispute was of vertiginous marginality (it was over the term *Einfühlung* as deployed in the 1880s by the Vischers: Friedrich Theodor Vischer and his son Robert), even though difficult to understand and clearly part of a discourse that had been carried on by what Assmann would surely have identified as a modern, scholarly enclave culture. But it was the direct connection, a different but related kind of empathy, between my current undergraduate teacher and E.H. Gombrich, whose *Story of Art* was the most important art book I had owned in my youth, that was most exciting to me. Gombrich's presentation on Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece, and particularly the Crucifixion panel, is imprinted on my childhood memory in a way that made me sympathise with the encounter with the suffering Christ depicted by Thornton in *The New Boy* when I watched the film recently. Gombrich's lament in his letter to the *LRB*, under Hope's review and concerning his biographical study of Warburg, expressed despair at this assessment of the work, which Wind 'found it his duty to drag through the mud'.²² This was the kind of academic frisson that fired my sense of the stakes of art history. The persistence of these symbols, as well as the dissonance of Panofsky's image of the 'Australian bushman' contrasted with the 'ancient Greek', remain sites of contestation today. Warburg might have called it an unpolarised image. The distinction of course is the lack of any break in the lives of Australia's First Peoples – the oldest continuous living cultures on earth – and the distance of Greek antiquity. This problem, then, gives us a direct imperative to continue exploring the question of the history of art. In these encounters, it seemed that the distance was not so great. In fact, the generations that connect us to these histories, and to the history of art history, also represent a living culture.

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²¹ Charles Hope, 'Naming the Graces', *London Review of Books*, 6.5 (15 March 1984) and related letters, <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v06/n05/charles-hope/naming-the-graces>>.

²² E.H. Gombrich, Letter to the editor, *London Review of Books*, 6.6 (5 April 1984), <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v06/n05/charles-hope/naming-the-graces>>. Gombrich is referring to Edgar Wind, 'On a Recent Biography of Warburg', in Edgar Wind, *The Eloquence of Symbols: Studies in Humanistic Art*, ed. by Jaynie Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 106–13.

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